

Natural Affiliations: Art and Recreation

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." - Aldo Leopold

by Dan Harpole

The arts can serve as a hinge between recreational use of public lands, and the singular communities adjoining these special places. They can add unique value and appreciation to a natural resource and stewardship of that resource.

When one reflects upon the merger of art and nature, one inescapably recalls the prevalence of ancient pictographs and petroglyphs gracing our wild spaces. The magnificent life-size figures rouged on the walls of Utah's Horseshoe Canyon, for example—a legacy equal to that of any gallery in America. In Idaho, too, we have astonishing pictographs in remote Birch Creek Valley or at Stoddard Creek on the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.

In contemporary times, surely no artist has merged wild or natural surroundings with art or environmental sculpture with greater originality than Andrew Goldsworthy, English-born resident of Scotland. Experimenting with leaves, grasses, stones, wood, sand, clay, natural pigments, ice and snow, and using the seasons as well, he creates transient sculptural pieces that subtly evince the mortality of nature: growth, stasis, decay. His ephemeral materials are a lovely reminder, even if seen only in a book (see [Andy Goldsworthy: A Collaboration with Nature](#)) of the relationship of humans and their art forms organized or conducted within

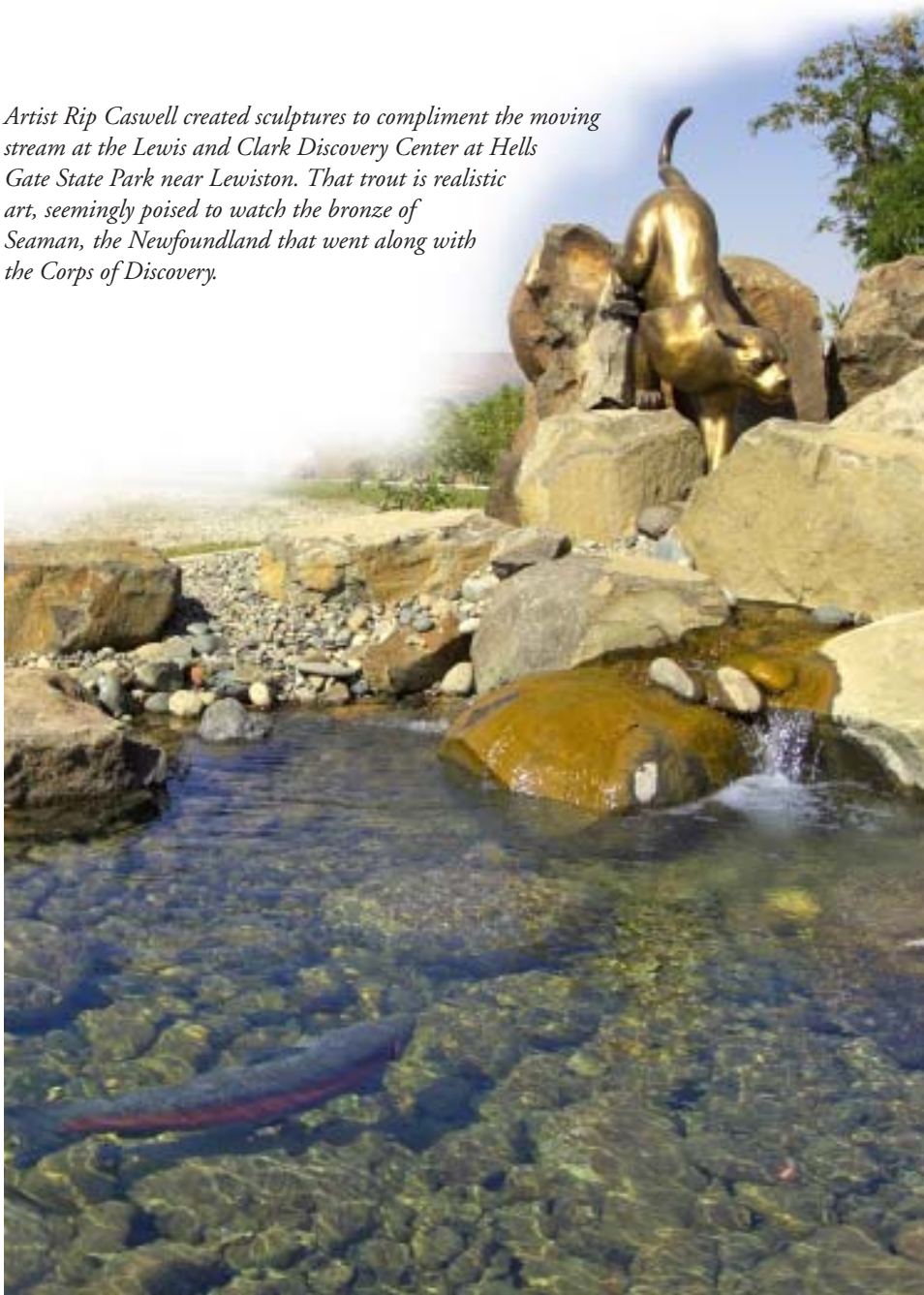


Celebrating the art of yesterday: Native American pictographs near Hells Gate State Park.

the larger compass of nature. When carefully considered and accomplished, artistic efforts within the natural realm may enhance the experience of both visitor and viewer.

Thomas Moran, an early English-American painter, is another iconic example. As a member of the Hayden Survey in 1871, he sketched the region we now know as Yellowstone. Upon his return, his drawings and his splendid 7 x 12-foot oil painting of the “Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone” hung in the Capitol and proved influentially persuasive in the congressional vote establishing Yellowstone National Park in 1872. His later paintings of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, Yosemite, and Idaho’s Shoshone Falls on the Snake River elicited a similar national regard and reverence.

Artist Rip Caswell created sculptures to compliment the moving stream at the Lewis and Clark Discovery Center at Hells Gate State Park near Lewiston. That trout is realistic art, seemingly poised to watch the bronze of Seaman, the Newfoundland that went along with the Corps of Discovery.





Art is often an integral part of a park. In Idaho's Shakespeare Festival, it is the other way around.

In the West, there are several programs linking art and natural areas or outdoor recreation. The recent installation (1996) of poet William Stafford's "Methow River Poems" on porcelain plaques at seven locations alongside Highway 20 in northern Washington State's Cascades is an outstanding and unforgettable example. Commissioned by the U. S. Forest Service, the poems run from the Methow's confluence with the Columbia River all the way up north to Washington Pass.

Another is the current "Confluence Project," to be completed in 2007—a series of interpretive artworks being designed by Maya Lin, best known as the architect of the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C. At seven sites along the Snake River watershed, Maya Lin will unite architectural and landscape design with environmental features to tell a story about the history, culture, and ecology of each site.

This artistry is a collaboration among the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Lewis and Clark Commemorative Committee. Grants from the National Endowment of the Arts will assist with work at three of the sites.

In Idaho, several partnership efforts connecting the arts and the natural landscape are noteworthy and commendable.

- *Idaho Paints Idaho*, a partnership between the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands and the Eagle Rock Art Museum, showcases Idaho artists and Idaho State Park and Recreation sites. Using a peer panel to review submissions, an exhibit and catalogue of the better pieces is assembled to tour the state, concluding with an exhibition at the Capitol.

- *Arts & Trails* was another grant program, done in 2004 in collaboration with the state arts agencies of Oregon and Washington, the

NEA, and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation program of the National Park Service. It supported public artworks that connected with broadly defined outdoor trail systems. In Idaho, the McCall Arts and Humanities Council was the major partner earning the award in this state. The MAHC worked with a group of other local community partners, along with Boise artist Amy Westover, to complete a design that established imaginative stone cairns—each surmounted with a map and description of nearby natural features—along local recreational trails.

- Craters of the Moon National Monument, Craters of the Moon Natural History Association, Idaho State University, and Idaho Natural History Museum recently combined photography and poetry to raise public awareness of Idaho's remarkable geological feature, the Great Rift. Their exhibit will travel to several locations before taking permanent residence at the Monument's visitor center.

- Annually, Harriman State Park in eastern Idaho hosts the "Mountains and Strings Chamber Music Retreat." This youth program, offered in partnership with BYU-Idaho, is a one-week, classical music retreat that culminates in several public performances, bringing more than 400 visitors to the park.

- Idaho Shakespeare Festival Amphitheater in Boise is exemplary proof that art need not detract from a natural setting. Located within a cottonwood grove alongside the Boise River, this cultural facility in turn helped preserve its surrounding riparian habitat for animals and waterfowl. The site originally was owned by Barber Lumber Company. Barber merged with Boise Cascade Corporation, and decades later Boise Cascade donated the property to the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Land. Eventually, the acreage and its access area were divided between the Idaho Shakespeare Festival for its theater and the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation for its headquarters.

Furthermore, joint promotion of cultural assets and outdoor recreational opportunities often can pay its own way. The Travel Industry of America provides an excellent instance in evidence along the Blue Ridge Parkway of North Carolina. www.HandMadeinAmerica.org;

On-site cultural programs at outdoor recreational sites often include presentations at state park campground outdoor theatres. Visual arts and public arts, moreover, can be embraced in signage, seating, facilities, and visitor centers. Artist-in-residence programs (fine, folk, and performing artists) at state parks are another common and popular method of bringing the arts to such locations. All of them provide a way to educate the public about art, the environment or landscape, and the challenges of stewardship of public lands

The Idaho Commission on the Arts is pleased to have been a partner in several successful programs with outdoor recreation. These mutual endeavors modestly amplify art and nature, augmenting appreciation of both for the benefit of all. We welcome the opportunity to provide support for such efforts through grants, awards, and technical assistance. For more information, please visit our Web-site: www.arts.idaho.gov

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